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*Chairman*: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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Agenda item 112: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 112: Promotion and protection of the rights of children** *(continued)* (A/54/98, 265, 411, 419 and 430)

1. **Ms. Raguž** (Croatia) said that the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child afforded the international community a unique opportunity to take stock of its achievements on behalf of children to date and to prepare itself for the challenges that would face children in the next century. In that regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child played a crucial role in advocating and monitoring the implementation of the Convention and valuable support was provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) through the Plan of Action that it had launched in 1996 to strengthen adherence to the principles in the Convention. More needed to be done to ensure that the international standards for children's rights were fully implemented. Her delegation had been struck by the commitment of United Nations bodies, including UNICEF, to that task and hoped that the entire international community would continue to demonstrate such commitment long after the momentous decade for the history of children's rights ended.

2. Mr. Otunnu had shown how widely children were suffering or had suffered from armed conflict and its consequences, and children in her own country had personal experience of what he had meant. Member States must act urgently to implement the forward-looking recommendations in his report. The ground-breaking adoption of Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) had provided an important tool by which to concentrate on the crucial problems and place children high on the international peace and security agenda. Enabling children fully to realize their rights also entailed concerted efforts to eradicate poverty. The recent adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 and the accompanying Recommendation No. 190 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour represented a significant step in the right direction.

3. Regarding national action to ensure children's rights, Croatia had incorporated the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its domestic law. Pursuant to the Convention and to the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, it had established a national programme of action for children. The programme had been drawn up with the participation of representatives of the Government and of non-governmental organizations concerned with child welfare, and a national committee had been set up to monitor its implementation. A national programme on human rights education had recently been finalized and would shortly be incorporated in all elementary and secondary school curricula.

4. In many countries, including her own, landmines remained a serious problem. Sadly, it was women and children who were the most vulnerable to them. UNICEF and national authorities had been cooperating in implementing a national mine-awareness programme. It, too, would be incorporated in school curricula. The Second Regional Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines, held in Zagreb in June, had had a positive impact on efforts to eliminate the landmine problem, but it remained that countries in transition, like her own, had to rededicate themselves to finding ways to fund the protection of children.

5. **Mr. Jassim** (Bahrain) said that there could be no disagreement concerning the importance of the rights of the child. It was all the more appalling, then, that children were still being callously exploited for gain and compelled to serve as soldiers. Children who were expelled from their homes or pressed into military service as a result of armed conflict, in particular, shamed all humanity in view of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6. His own country had long since acceded to the Convention and had made abundant resources available for the health, social development and education of Bahraini children, with noteworthy results in the form of declining infant mortality rates and higher school attendance. The abuse of children was now legally reportable, and a special court had been established to investigate cases of child abuse and death in unclear circumstances. The United Nations and other international bodies, notably UNICEF, were to be commended for their excellent work in the area of children's welfare. The international community must understand that greater efforts to promote and protect the rights of children were required if the children of today were to enjoy a brighter future in the third millennium.

7. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said it was a tragic irony that, a decade after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the situation of many of the world's children was, as Mr. Otunnu, Ms. Bellamy and Ms. Calcetas-Santos had indicated, so bad that the question could be asked whether the international community had not failed them. Mr. Otunnu had spoken of the importance for remedying that situation of reinforcing traditional value systems, and the Holy See wholeheartedly

supported that view. Respect for the dignity of the human person, the sacredness of the family and the role of parents in children's upbringing were all basic values that the international community had solemnly recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There had, however, been repeated attempts to overlook or flout them, and delegations which had insisted that they must be upheld had been attacked as adversaries.

8. Pope John Paul II had spoken in his message for World Day of Peace 1999 of the terrible legacy that children who grew up against a background of conflict or who, worse still, were forced to fight would bear for the rest of their lives. If it failed to respect fundamental values and persisted in its abominable crimes against children born and unborn, the family of nations would end up by digging the graveyards of future generations.

9. The first step towards remedying the situation was to create genuine international awareness of the dignity of the human person. Maintaining that dignity entailed love and care that could only be found in the context of the family. Strengthening the family was the best way of protecting children: remove children from the family environment and increases in violence and crime were assured. In addition to love and care, children needed guidance, and that was something parents had both the privilege and duty of providing. Their children's upbringing and future were in their hands.

10. Two decades after the International Year of the Child and almost a decade after the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, over 20 million children had become victims of armed conflict and millions more suffered poverty or exploitation. The international community must not delay in halting the causative crimes of omission and commission. It must condemn all attempts to involve children in armed conflicts and express its resolve to protect them from the effects of such conflicts. The Holy See, for its part, would persist in its defence of the values that it believed to be fundamental to any sincere attempt to protect children worldwide, in its historical commitment to the world's needy children and in its appeal that children, who were being prepared to build the society of the future, should be taught to live in peace.

11. **Ms. Nyamsuren** (Mongolia) said that it was gratifying to note that 191 countries had become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and hoped that universal adherence to it would be achieved. Mongolia, which had been among the first to ratify the Convention, cooperated actively with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and was implementing a national action programme for the development of children. The report on the protection of children affected by armed conflict (A/54/430) and the report on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/54/411) vividly demonstrated that much still needed to be done to ensure the rights of children enshrined in the Convention. Other reports also indicated the enormous work being carried out by UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, UNHCR and non-governmental organizations to protect and promote the basic rights of children.

12. Protecting children in armed conflicts had become one of the most pressing security and moral issues facing the world. In current armed conflicts, it was the civilian population, particularly women and children, who suffered the most. All societies were morally bound to protect children and create the necessary conditions for their development, education and welfare. In that respect, her delegation welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), which provided a most important tool for advocacy on behalf of children affected by conflict.

13. Mongolia supported the suggestion by the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography urging the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice to include the issue of child pornography when it considered computer crimes at the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders. Her delegation also favoured early adoption of the draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Like the Special Rapporteur, she was also shocked to learn the incidence of the abuse of girls in domestic service even in some diplomatic missions in certain countries. In that connection, Mongolia welcomed the adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and considered its early ratification extremely important.

14. Like many other countries undergoing fundamental changes, Mongolia had been grappling with the challenges of the transition period for the past eight years. A large section of its population was poor and unemployed, and the child mortality rate was still high. Almost a quarter of the population still did not have access to safe drinking water, and the phenomenon of street children was causing deep concern. To address those problems, her Government was mobilizing all its internal resources in implementing various programmes and projects. In that connection, she expressed gratitude to UNICEF for its continued active support for the welfare of Mongolian children.

15. **Mr. Sun Ang** (People's Republic of China) said that the principle set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the

Child that children's best interests must be the paramount consideration was the common understanding of all those in the world who loved and cared for children. It was also a principle to be followed by all States in matters concerning children. To ensure that it was universally applied, greater efforts were needed to, in particular, persuade all States which had not yet done so to accede to the Convention; complete the drafting of the optional protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and create conditions conducive to the implementation of the Convention. The latter meant, in particular, respecting national traditions and cultural values and improving the living conditions of children in developing countries.

16. China was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was solemnly committed to ensuring respect for the rights that it embodied. Furtherance of children's survival, protection and development were important tasks for the Chinese Government and Chinese society, and the country's successes in that regard had won worldwide attention. China was willing to work with other countries and make greater efforts to promote and protect children's rights.

17. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) said that, as a country principally composed of young people, Uganda felt a special interest in the item under discussion. As the documents before the Committee showed, for many children, life had been degraded beyond measure, and protestations of concern for children's rights were too often void of substance. The world should realize, therefore, that tomorrow's generation might well be abnormal. That said, the dialogue with Mr. Otunnu, Ms. Calcetas-Santos, Ms. Bellamy and Mr. N'Diaye had been constructive.

18. As evidence of its concern for children, Uganda had ratified the African Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, established a National Council for Children and a National Plan of Action for Children and enacted a children's statute. It had also publicized nationally and internationally the fact that its children were suffering severely as a result of armed conflict. Mr. Otunnu had referred in paragraph 103 of his report (A/54/430) to her Government's pledge to facilitate the release and repatriation of children who had been abducted from northern Uganda by the insurgent group, the Lords' Resistance Army. That group's treatment of children was so horrendous that the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF had described it as without precedent anywhere, a blood-chilling, heart-breaking outrage targeted deliberately at children. It warranted a field mission by Mr. Otunnu to Uganda.

19. Uganda was very grateful to all the countries and international and non-governmental organizations that had joined it in its struggle to give its children their full complement of human rights. Special tribute was due in that respect to UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognized injustices against children, including rape and slaughter, as heinous crimes, and yet adults continued to inflict them. They must understand that, for many children, poverty, malnutrition, disease and natural disasters already constituted an intolerable burden; if added to it, the scars of deliberate harm would never heal.

20. **Mr. Amir** (Sudan) said that while parts of the world were enjoying economic prosperity and technological progress, the developing countries faced deepening poverty and inadequate basic services, to the detriment of their children's welfare. In that connection, three of the approaches outlined in the Special Representative's report (promoting and reinforcing local value systems, building local capacities for protection and advocacy, and providing protection and relief for internally displaced communities) were particularly noteworthy. In armed conflict situations, in particular, children were forced to serve in armies, thus risking death or mutilation, or were driven from their homes, with the attendant risks of instability, disease and educational deprivation. The international community must find ways of dealing with that issue. Unaccompanied children, economic exploitation and trafficking in children were also urgent problems.

21. While awareness of the rights of children was undoubtedly widespread, that awareness had not yet been fully translated into tangible form. International cooperation had an important role to play in that connection. In particular, the official development assistance provided by the developed countries should be increased to its desirable level of 0.07 per cent of gross domestic product.

22. The concern for the welfare of children, which his country had demonstrated by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was reflected in its Constitution, which afforded ample protection for children's rights and welfare, including the right to education and health care. Health care had in fact been greatly expanded: the country had become 70 per cent self-sufficient in pharmaceutical products. But then the Al-Shifa plant had been destroyed in an act of aggression which had harmed not only the children of the Sudan but also those of neighbouring countries, whose needs that plant had supplied. His Government was striving to restore stability to the southern part of the country. There

was cause for concern about the welfare of children there, who were recruited as soldiers, used as human shields, and otherwise exploited in ways that should be condemned by the international community.

23. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala) said that, although still high, the infant mortality rate in his country had diminished dramatically. In the field of education, Guatemala was seeking to expand education coverage at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. The aim was to guarantee universal access to at least the first three years of primary education and reduce illiteracy to 30 per cent by 2000.

24. His delegation expressed gratitude to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography for her initial recommendation to the Government. According to information from the Guatemalan Public Ministry, in February 1994, 20 organizations had been engaged in the kidnapping of children in the country, and an average of six children per day had been kidnapped by traffickers in minors dealing in illegal adoptions. A study showed that international adoptions greatly outnumbered national adoptions in Guatemala. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund, the United States of America, France, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Australia, the United Kingdom and Israel were the countries that received the greatest number of Guatemalan children as adoptees.

25. The cost of adopting a child varied from $10,000 to $30,000. Adoption had thus become a commercial pursuit that brought ever greater profits to its practitioners, who included lawyers, doctors, public officials and a variety of other persons who had made adoption into a most unsavoury business. A report by the Public Ministry on violations of the rights of children showed that most of the cases registered related to the abduction of children and the second largest group of offenses involved cases of sexual abuse.

26. The problems affecting children, however, had not been neglected. The Office of the Attorney General had submitted to the Congress a draft law on adoptions, which provided for the establishment of an adoption council in order to review the files of children who were being adopted and keep records of the minors and adoptive parents. The draft law would also regulate the participation of notaries public in the adoption process and require final approval by a judge.

27. Poverty, the disintegration of the family and the expansion of the informal sector of the economy were among the factors that brought children and young people into the labour market. The Unit for the Protection of Minor Workers of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was responsible for conducting the national child labour policy and provided protection in accordance with the guidelines laid down in Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Unit was seeking to put an end to the hiring of children under 12 and to eliminate high-risk employment completely. In 1996, the Guatemalan Labour Ministry and ILO had signed a memorandum of understanding on a commitment to adopt the strategies of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Employers had agreed to establish a national commission for the protection of young workers, and draft amendments to the Labour Code were being drawn up. In June 1999, Guatemala had signed ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which dealt with the sale of and trafficking in children, forced labour, servitude and subjecting children to prostitution or pornography.

28. The Secretariat for Social Welfare was the government agency responsible for carrying out public social policy, strategies and programmes for the benefit of children and young people. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Constitution, the Secretariat had, since 1997, been engaged in a process of expanding its operations to assist vulnerable children and young people.

29. Guatemala had established a national commission on the rights of the child, in which 42 governmental and non-governmental organizations participated, under the coordination of the Human Rights Ombudsman, represented by the Defender of Children. Those organizations had submitted to Congress a draft code for children that would introduce significant changes in judicial and administrative procedures relating to children. In 1996, Guatemala had enacted a law to prevent and eradicate violence within the family, which provided protection to women, the elderly and children subjected to abuse. Although the situation of children had improved considerably, much remained to be done. The adoption of the draft code for children would help protect their rights and eliminate the various problems affecting them.

30. **Mr. Niehaus** (Costa Rica) said that extreme poverty was a problem that affected millions of children throughout the world. Approximately 800 million children were malnourished, and a similar number had no access to the most basic health services or adequate housing. Hundreds of millions of children did not receive even the most minimal education. The international community must conduct coordinated action to eliminate poverty and promote sustainable development in order to overcome those problems.

31. The situation of children who were the victims of armed conflict was no less serious. More than 2 million children had died in approximately 30 armed conflicts around the world, and about a quarter of a million had participated as combatants. More than 4 million children had been physically disabled, more than 1 million had been orphaned, and approximately 12 million had lost their homes. Coordinated action must be taken to solve the unique problems affecting children in armed conflict. As a first step, Costa Rica supported the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on Rights of the Child, which would declare 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces.

32. The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was a third area of concern. His country, unfortunately, had not been immune to "sex tourism". The Costa Rican Government, therefore, had decided to use the full force of the law to punish persons engaging in such criminal activity. Trafficking in minors for sexual purposes, prostitution and pornography had been defined as criminal offenses. Rehabilitation programmes had been instituted to provide care for the victims of such abuse.

33. The situation of working children also gave rise to concern. Costa Rica was seeking to prohibit and limit the worst forms of child labour and had initiated the process of ratifying ILO Convention No. 182. In addition, his Government had launched a national programme to combat child labour, which had already rescued more than 100 working children from the street. Greater efforts must be made to recognize the value of the family and protect its role as the basic unit of society. Lastly, his delegation urged the States' parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that had not yet done so to declare their support for the proposed amendment to article 43, paragraph (b), of the Convention, which would expand the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18.

34. **Ms. Martinez** (Ecuador) said that her delegation supported the statement to be made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group on the agenda item under consideration. Because of recent volcanic eruptions, thousands of Ecuadorian families had been forced to leave their homes and were living in shelters. Thirteen hundred children and adolescents had been relocated to primary and secondary schools near shelters in order to continue their education. In spite of the difficulties involved, she was confident that the measures being taken by the Government would alleviate the suffering of the persons affected and enable them to return home once the danger had passed.

35. With the support of the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund, the Ecuadorian Government was continuing to promote legal reforms aimed at ensuring overall protection for children in accordance with the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Work was being carried out to set up a national decentralized system for the overall protection of children and adolescents and establish an independent and specialized justice system in that field. It was hoped that, with the commitment of the Government and assistance from various United Nations bodies and international and bilateral financial and technical cooperation, it would be possible to set up a sound system guaranteeing the full exercise of the rights of all minors. All measures to help children should be part of a global strategy to combat poverty. As long as poverty existed, minors, especially girls, would continue to be the ones that suffered the most.

36. Her delegation expressed its support for the work of UNICEF in designing a new world programme that would make it possible to redefine the steps to be taken in the twenty-first century on the basis of a commitment to the goals of the World Summit for Children. Ecuador supported the various initiatives that were currently under way as well as its support for the Fund's role as secretariat for the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Summit planned for 2001. Ecuador pledged to participate in the work of the preparatory committee so that the general evaluation of progress made and the identification of obstacles encountered could serve as a basis for further agreements for reaching the targets proposed for children throughout the world. Lastly, she expressed her Government's support for the work being conducted by the International Labour Organization aimed at the gradual elimination of child labour. Her delegation fully agreed with the view that the elimination of child labour was an end in itself, but should also serve as a powerful instrument for promoting overall economic and human development.

37. **Mr. Kamara** (Sierra Leone) said that positive steps must be taken at both the national and international level to combat the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Above all, advocacy was needed to make children and their parents aware of their rights and to bring those abuses to the attention of the authorities in time. The question of children and armed conflict was of particular interest to Sierra Leone, where child soldiers had been a tragic feature of the rebel war that had started in March 1991. More than 10,000 children under the age of 18 had been enlisted as fighters by the rebels. There were an estimated 2.5 million refugees in Sierra Leone, 60 per cent of whom were children. Those children had gone through

extreme mental and physical hardship and required special care to recover from the brutality that they had endured. Most of those children had been abducted. Boys had been ordered to go through military training and take part in active combat, and girls had been repeatedly and violently abused sexually.

38. The Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government and the rebels focused on war-affected children. Successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers would be a decisive element in re-establishing a climate of security and stability. Without timely assistance, war-torn societies in Africa could quickly fall back into a cycle of violence. A comprehensive programme of assistance was needed in order to bring durable and sustainable peace to the countries affected and the African continent as a whole. The complex problems of war-affected children called for prompt and proportionate responses. Close cooperation between international organizations, regional bodies and civil society was crucial in devising coordinated responses and imaginative solutions. Ensuring respect for the rights of children, and their protection and welfare was a collective obligation.

39. His delegation was grateful for the assistance provided by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who had proposed a special agenda for action for the children of Sierra Leone. It was hoped that that proposal would receive the attention that it deserved. There was a strong correlation between the easy availability of small arms and the dramatic rise in the victimization of children and women. The proliferation of those weapons had made it possible for very young children to be used as perpetrators of violence. Concerted action was therefore needed to stop the illicit production of small arms and light weapons and trafficking in them. Lastly, his delegation paid tribute to the important work carried out by UNICEF, UNHCR and other agencies and non-governmental agencies in alleviating the impact of armed conflict on children.

40. **Mr. Kazykhanov** (Kazakhstan) highly commended the activities carried out by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in creating awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and providing recommendations to States parties on its implementation. His delegation noted with great satisfaction that UNICEF had continued its efforts to mainstream human rights in all aspects of its work and welcomed the Fund's rights-based approach to programming. In implementing its medium-term plan, UNICEF should play a decisive role in increasing support for children involved in armed conflicts.

41. The Fund should reorient its policies in order to take timely decisions with regard to regions of potential conflict, adopting preventive measures to avert crises that could lead to mass violations of the rights of children, mothers and other socially vulnerable groups. The experience gained by UNICEF in teaching children about peace, tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution was very valuable and should be further developed and applied in practice.

42. Terrifying violations of the rights of children were still taking place, causing great suffering and irreversible harm to their health. In the past decade, about 2 million children had died as a result of war, and some 6 million had become physically disabled. Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) was an important advocacy tool for protecting the welfare of children and guaranteeing their rights. In that context, his delegation noted with great satisfaction that the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on involvement of children in armed conflict had reaffirmed its commitment to conclude work in the year 2000.

43. Kazakhstan, a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was doing its utmost to implement its provisions and had adopted a number of legislative instruments to protect the rights of children in accordance with the principles of international law. Lastly, he underscored the importance of the effective cooperation with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies in implementing General Assembly resolution 53/1 H on the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region and the special programme that provided support and health care for the children of the Aral Sea.

44. **Mr. Ingólfsson** (Iceland) said that an increasing number of children around the world faced new dangers which threatened their right to childhood and development and even their lives. Children's interests should thus be high on the United Nations agenda and form an integral part of policy planning in development. Given that poverty was a root cause of child labour, interventions must be based on careful analysis of the cultural, economic and social environment in which a child worked. In many cases, such work was an important part of a child's socialization and represented a rational response to a family's limited options. It was unacceptable, however, that children should be exposed to hazardous, exploitative, socially damaging or educationally limiting work, which was why Iceland welcomed the new ILO Convention.

45. It was generally accepted that poverty was a root cause of global phenomena such as the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. International cooperation

was required not only at the governmental level, but also between private partners. The media could play an important role in preventing commercial sexual exploitation of children, which resulted as much from a moral and spiritual crisis as from social, economic and political factors.

46. Education was not only a fundamental right of children, but crucial to the elimination of all forms of human rights violations against children. In an age of increased migration between countries, many children were disadvantaged by having to study in a new language, and that issue must be addressed. Above all, it was vital that children and young people should be involved in the discussions and actions which sought to improve their social environment and set minimum international living standards for children.

47. The foreign ministers of the five Nordic countries had recently issued a joint declaration against the use of child soldiers, noting the need to raise international standards in that regard. Iceland supported the urgent finalization of the relevant draft optional protocol. Children should not take part in hostilities under any circumstances.

48. **Mr. Sergiwa** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that children, as the hope of the future and the most vulnerable members of society, had to be protected from sexual and economic exploitation and trafficking. The international community should therefore take effective action at all levels to ensure that they enjoyed adequate standards of living, educational opportunities and health care. The most effective approach would consist in supporting families: the family, as the basis of society, had a major role to play in protecting the rights of children.

49. Despite the best efforts of the United Nations, poverty and hardship were still the lot of many of the world's children, notably in the developing countries. In Africa, in particular, children were all too often the victims of armed conflict, a situation aggravated by natural disaster, disease, an adverse economic environment and the growing burden of foreign debt, while in Palestine and other occupied territories, children were being killed, tortured and imprisoned without having committed any crime. In countries infested with landmines left over from the Second World War and subsequent conflicts, people were being killed and maimed; inevitably, many of the victims were children. The countries responsible for placing the mines displayed no concern, offering no compensation and providing no technical assistance for demining.

50. Armed conflicts in which children were recruited as soldiers were a blot on the escutcheon of mankind, and it was to be hoped that the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, would bring its work to a successful conclusion shortly. The Secretary-General's Special Representative had done admirable work in raising awareness of the issue.

51. The tenth anniversary of the Convention afforded an excellent occasion for evaluating its role in promoting the rights of the child at all levels and for encouraging States parties to implement all the provisions of the Convention. His own country had adopted legislation, based on the teachings of the Islamic religion and on the society's customs and values, for the protection and welfare of children. Much had been accomplished, despite the difficulties arising from the unjust sanctions which had been imposed on the country for over seven years.

52. He commended UNICEF for its work with children, especially disabled children, and the Commission on Human Rights for its report on trafficking in children. It was to be hoped that the preparation of the draft optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would soon be completed.

53. **Ms. Cossa** (Mozambique) said that Mozambique wished to associate itself with the statement made by Namibia. Her Government was committed to ensuring that the rights of the child were respected by all citizens, and was taking legislative and other measures to improve the living conditions of Mozambican children. One of the major challenges still facing her Government was the reintegration of children orphaned, traumatized or disabled by war. With the help of national and international non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), her Government had been providing shelter, food, health care and education for such children, but had been hampered by a lack of funding. In view of the importance of ensuring that the rights of the child were respected in situations of armed conflict, UNICEF, which had considerable experience in that area, must receive the necessary resources to enable it to continue its work.

54. Regrettably, children were being prematurely forced into adulthood. The international community must take concrete action against child prostitution to ensure that the girls of today might become the dignified women of tomorrow. Given that child prostitution contributed significantly to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Mozambique, the Government was seeking to raise awareness of the pandemic through educational campaigns and was examining ways to tackle trafficking in children.

55. **Mrs. Ramiro Lopez** (Philippines) reiterated her Government's commitment to the Convention on the Rights

of the Child, which embodied the simple truth that children had rights as adults did. Filipino legislation had long defined the rights and responsibilities of both children and parents; and a national plan for children focused on key areas of concern. Additional laws had been enacted to ensure the iodization of salt, immunization with increased coverage of 90 per cent, the promotion of breast feeding, and school-based health and nutrition programmes. Children in remote areas and poor communities had access to primary education, and the Government was currently in the process of improving services for pre-school children.

56. Despite a generally favourable domestic environment, Filipino children continued to be vulnerable to human rights violations. The Government had introduced legislation stipulating stiffer penalties for child prostitution and trafficking, the use of children in obscene shows, and other sexual offences. Certain categories of children — such as working children and those in situations of armed conflict — were accorded special protection. Domestic and inter-country adoption laws had been passed, *inter alia*, to combat the sale of children. A bill declaring paedophilia a heinous crime was currently on the legislative agenda. The Government, in cooperation with the private sector, had also sought to provide shelter and rehabilitative services to girls who had been sexually abused, and a national plan of action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children was being developed.

57. Of a total of 22.4 million Filipino children 3.7 million worked for a living, some in a hazardous environment. Her Government had ratified ILO Convention No. 138, which called for the strengthened enforcement of existing national laws on child labour, particularly in regard to the minimum age of employment, which was currently 15 years. Since 1992, an inter-agency effort had rescued over 200 minors employed, *inter alia*, in bars and nightclubs. The Government had also issued guidelines on hazardous occupations for young workers and was seeking early ratification of the new ILO Convention.

58. There were currently some 200,000 street children in the Philippines. Programmes aimed to reunite them with their families and to provide education and work opportunities, as well as other basic services. The Government had also taken measures to combat the involvement of children in armed conflict and to reintegrate child victims into the community. In implementing its programmes to promote the rights of the child, her Government was particularly grateful for the support of UNICEF and ILO.

59. **Mr. Jit** (India) said that on the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child little had changed. Not only were children used in conflicts by non-State actors, but they increasingly suffered domestic violence, or were thrown into an adults' world to eke out a living. Issues concerning children should be seen in their socio-economic context; all too often, however, a narrow, situation-based approach or human rights exercise was adopted which ignored the realities of developing countries. Rights could hardly be realized with families progressively marginalized against an influx of private capital, which invested precious little in social development, including education, health, affordable nutrition, water and sanitation.

60. It was all too easy to talk abstractly of "children in armed conflicts", "children in prostitution" and human rights. In the absence of funding and technological resources, no economic or social agenda could hope to be conducted. All developing countries were deeply concerned about their children, their rights and welfare. However, 130 million children were deprived of basic education, 200 million under the age of five were malnourished. At the core lay the strong correlation between poverty and exclusion, with meagre resources hardly having any impact in those areas of concern.

61. Governments were open to scrutiny, but mechanisms were needed to ensure that non-State actors and terrorists — who were largely responsible for exploiting children in armed conflict — were brought to account. His delegation agreed that the most damaging loss a society could suffer was the collapse of its own value system. Indeed, the destruction of a society's future was inevitable if its children grew up warped, traumatized and without hope. There had been much talk of humanitarian interventions for children. Regrettably, however, there was seldom mention of cooperative efforts to ensure sustained economic growth, which alone could eradicate the root cause of exclusion and conflicts, namely poverty.

62. **Ms. Kim Hyo-eun** (Republic of Korea) said that despite tangible improvements in the well-being of children, stark regional disparities persisted, *inter alia* in health and education. The situation could, however, be changed significantly through national efforts and international support. Today's conflicts poignantly demonstrated that children had become targets of violence and were used as human hostages in unscrupulous military actions intended to force communities to submit. Children in war zones were made to kill fellow human beings without comprehending the magnitude of their crimes. The scars left on young, impressionable minds made social reintegration extremely challenging.

63. The immediate goal was to remove the most intolerable forms of child labour; her delegation particularly welcomed the fact that the new ILO Convention did not confine the definition of child labour to economic exploitation. Given that poverty was an underlying cause of child labour, the international community should redouble its efforts in that regard. Universal access to primary education should also be a priority, as should international action against the providers and customers in the sex industry and sex tourism. Her delegation strongly supported the recommendation that the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders should consider the issue of child pornography. It was also to be hoped that the group of experts on the elaboration of a draft convention against organized transnational crime would coordinate closely with the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

64. Lastly, the Republic of Korea welcomed the progress made in immunization since the World Summit for Children, particularly the UNICEF-led initiative to establish the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and the Children's Vaccine Fund. At both the international and global levels, the fate of the world's children must be a priority. Her Government pledged to do its utmost in support of that worthwhile endeavour.

65. **Ms. Monroy** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the members of the Group attached particular importance to protecting and promoting the rights of the child and hoped that the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be speedily achieved. In that connection, the Rio Group supported the appeal to the States parties that had reservations to the Convention to review them so that they might be withdrawn. In view of the continuing physical abuse and exploitation of children in the world, much more must be done to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention's provisions.

66. The Rio Group underscored the important work being carried out by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and States parties should continue their efforts to implement the Committee's recommendations. The Group fully supported the approach taken by UNICEF in promoting the implementation of the Convention and noted with satisfaction the Fund's programmes and projects designed to assist States parties in submitting their reports and carrying out their obligations.

67. The sexual exploitation of children was one of the most heinous forms of violating the rights of children and caused irreparable physical and psychological damage. Effective national action and international cooperation were needed to combat child prostitution, sex tourism and child pornography. The production and dissemination of child pornography in any form must be prohibited and eradicated. In that connection, she reiterated the support of the Rio Group for the work carried out by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights in that regard. It was also hoped that the working group on a draft protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would soon achieve its objective.

68. A speedy and lasting solution must be found to alleviate the suffering of children in armed conflict and post-war situations. Concerted political action and international pressure must be applied against those who systematically violated the rights of children in that regard. The Group reiterated its firm support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and of the working group on a draft protocol on involvement of children in armed conflict.

69. She underscored the importance of the adoption of ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and stressed the urgent need to provide universal access to quality primary education for children. In that regard, she encouraged the work of the Special Rapporteur on the right of children to education. Governments, in cooperation with international organizations and non-governmental organizations, must continue work aimed at eliminating customs and practices that discriminated against and were harmful to girl children, in accordance with the recommendations put forward at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The situation of the growing number of children infected with HIV/AIDS, which was aggravated by a lack of family support and appropriate health systems, was alarming. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had given particular attention to disabled children, and its suggestions on the social integration of those children would reinforce action by States parties to adopt strategies to promote their participation in all aspects of life, particularly education.

70. In March 1999, the Rio Group had reaffirmed its commitment to guarantee the full enjoyment of the rights of the child under conditions favouring the full physical and intellectual development of children. Protecting children and promoting their rights was a joint task requiring the commitment of all actors in society. Through combined efforts, it would be possible to find lasting solutions to the problems affecting children, particularly in the poorest countries. In that regard, it was hoped that the draft

declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace would help to achieve the objectives of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. Lastly, the member countries of the Rio Group reiterated their commitment to the cause of children and would work actively to ensure the promotion and protection of their rights as one of the major challenges of the new millennium.

*The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.*